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SUBJECT: APRIL HUMAN RIGHTS UPDATE

SUMMARY:

11. The Prosecutor General (Fiscalia) asked for a 60-year sentence against ex-Senator Alvaro Garcia Romero for his role in facilitating paramilitary massacres, and charged former Cesar Governor Alvaro Araujo Noguera and his son, ex-Senator Alvaro Araujo Castro, for conspiring with paramilitaries to kidnap a political rival. 80 Congressmen have been implicated to date for paramilitary ties, with 32 serving time or in jail awaiting trial. The Fiscalia arrested two colonels and eight soldiers, bringing to 18 the number of military implicated to date in the Soacha extrajudicial killings investigation. The GOC also charged five soldiers in the 1998 deaths of three women in Ocana, and obtained 30-year sentences against seven soldiers for their roles in the 2006 murder of a San Jose de Apartado Peace Community member. Family members of victims killed by paramilitaries in Uraba filed suit against Dole Food for allegedly making payments to the United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC).
End Summary.

PARA-POLITICAL UPDATE

12. The Fiscalia requested a 60-year sentence (the maximum) against former Senator Alvaro "Gordo" Garcia Romero for his ties to paramilitary groups in Sucre and his alleged role as the mastermind of the Macayepo (Bolívar) Massacre (October, 2000). The Fiscalia also formally charged former Cesar Governor Alvaro Araujo Noguera and his son, ex-Senator Alvaro Araujo Castro, for their alleged roles in the kidnapping of political rival Victor Ochoa Daza. Garcia and the elder Araujo remain in jail. The younger Araujo is under house arrest due to illness.

13. As of April 30, 2009, 80 of Colombia's 268 congressmen have been implicated in the para-political scandal, and 29 have resigned as a result. 32 legislators are in jail (5 convicted and 27 awaiting case resolution); 33 are free but under investigation; four have been paroled; four have been linked to the paras by the media; and seven have been acquitted. Additionally, there are 16 governors implicated: nine are in jail (two convicted, seven awaiting case resolution); three are under investigation; three have been linked by the media; and one has been acquitted. Finally, there are 35 mayors implicated: 24 are in jail (one convicted, and 23 awaiting case resolution); two fugitive mayors are under investigation; eight have been linked by the

media; and one has been acquitted.

FALSE POSITIVES: 23 IMPLICATED, 7 SENTENCED

¶4. The Fiscalía arrested Colonels Wilson Javier Castro and Alvaro Diego Tamayo, in addition to eight soldiers under their commands, for their alleged roles in the 2008 Soacha extrajudicial executions. To date, 18 military have been detained in the Soacha cases. In other cases, the prosecutor in Ocana charged five soldiers with the July 1998 deaths of three women who were killed and presented as fallen guerrillas. Seven more soldiers were sentenced to 30 years in prison for their roles in the 2006 murder of Edilberto Vasquez Cardona, who was similarly portrayed as a fallen guerrilla. Vasquez was a member of the Arenas Altas "humanitarian zone," which is part of the San Jose de Apartado Peace Community in Uraba.

UNIONIST CAUGHT IN FARC CAMP CHARGED

¶5. The Fiscalía charged Juan Efrain Mendoza, ex-leader of agricultural-sector union Fensuagro, of ties to the FARC, extortion, and kidnapping after he was detained in February along with FARC front leader Bernardo Moreno ("Negro Antonio") during a military operation in Sumapaz (near Bogota). Mendoza claimed he had been kidnapped by the FARC, but Fiscalía investigators said he was captured while fleeing with the FARC and had a cell phone in his possession.

PARAMILITARY LEADERS CONFESS TO BURNING VICTIMS

¶6. Former United Self-Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC) leader Salvatore Mancuso, extradited to the United States last year on drug charges, testified in the Justice and Peace Law process that the AUC burned hundreds of victims in complicity with the military to conceal the number of deaths attributable to paramilitary groups. Former AUC member Jorge Ivan Laverde testified in October 2008 that the first burning of 98 bodies took place in Norte de Santander in 2001.

DOLE ACCUSED OF BANKROLLING MURDER OF UNIONISTS

¶7. Relatives of 51 victims murdered by the AUC in Uraba filed a wrongful death suit in the United States against Dole Foods for allegedly paying \$10 million to the AUC between 1997 and 2007 to keep unions out of its plantations. The plaintiffs' key witness is jailed AUC commander Jose Gregoria Mangones, who has admitted responsibility for more than half of the killings cited in the suit. Dole has categorically rejected the allegations.

JOURNALIST MURDERED

¶8. On March 24, radio journalist and local anti-corruption leader Jose Everardo Aguilar was killed by an unknown assailant in his home in Cauca. Aguilar's family said he received death threats linked to his reporting, and Cauca police are investigating possible motives. President Alvaro Uribe announced a GOC reward of \$25,000 for information relating to the murder. The Inter American Press Association (IAPA) condemned the killing and called for a thorough investigation. Aguilar is the first journalist murdered since 2007.

KIDNAPPING DATA REVISED DOWNWARD

¶9. After reviewing 3300 kidnapping cases reported since 1996, the National Fund for Personal Freedom (Fondelibertad) revised its estimate of the number of current kidnapping victims down to 125 (66 held by the FARC, 10 by the ELN, and the rest by emerging criminal groups). Some human rights groups questioned the figure, arguing that the true number ranges from 600 to several thousand. Five other countries in the region--Mexico, Brazil, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Haiti--reportedly now have higher kidnapping rates than Colombia.

FARC THREATENS PROSECUTOR GENERAL, MUNICIPAL COUNCILORS

¶10. The Police captured three suspected FARC members in Bogota who were plotting to assassinate Prosecutor General Mario Iguaran, possibly at a sporting event in May. The Colombia National Foundation of Councilmen (FENACON) announced that over 2000 of its members have received death threats from various illegal armed groups, mainly the FARC, in rural areas. FENACON also said that over 400 councilmen have been killed by illegal armed groups since 2000, though deaths have plummeted in recent years. Colombia National Police Citizen Security Director General Orlando Paez said in response to the report that the GOC would continue to make all efforts to guarantee protection of threatened councilmen.

BROWNFIELD